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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PANAMA 000715

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CEN/BRIGHAM

E.O. 12958:N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PM](#) [POL](#) [SPECIALIST](#)

SUBJECT: NAMES FLOATED, A BLAST FROM THE PAST, AND A SHOOTING. PANAMA ELECTION COUNTDOWN #8: 5 WEEKS TO GO

Ref: A. Panama 0651
 [B.](#) Panama 0613
 [C.](#) 03 Panama 3294)

Summary/Comment: Simmer to rolling boil

[11.](#) (SBU) Panama's electoral campaign suddenly became more interesting with a bristling 3/23 confrontation between Arnulfista youth and Endara supporters and a 3/24 shooting incident in a depressed area. From here forward, campaign tensions will mount, primarily in the form of mudslinging and editorials rather than violent confrontations. Thus far, there have been few surprises in cabinet nominations or endorsements. We doubt that any of the candidates want to identify possible Cabinet members this early, since the potential ministers could become a lightning rod for public criticism. Furthermore, none of the candidates want to offend key members of their campaign by excluding them from possible top jobs. See septels for reports on each of the three major campaigns. End Summary/Comment.

Campaigns' brush with violence

[12.](#) (SBU) Aside from vandalized political posters, election campaigning had been peaceful until this week. A March 23 Arnulfista youth gathering on a main street in Panama ended with a strident, though not physical, confrontation between mainstream Arnulfistas and Endaristas. Arnulfista youth gathered at noon on the Transistmian highway near presidential candidate Guillermo Endara's campaign center. The Endaristas, who consider that area their turf, exited the center and confronted the Arnulfistas. After the yelling and cursing began, an Endarista called the Electoral Tribunal and Electoral Delegates where sent to the area to calm the waters. No damage or injuries were reported. (NOTE: Former President Guillermo Endara, a lifelong Arnulfista, is running on the Solidarity ticket because he asserts the party has strayed from its roots under President Moscoso's leadership. END NOTE)

Activist shot

[13.](#) (SBU) In a violent incident, on March 24 a political activist that supports Arnulfista legislator Francisco Reyes was shot in her left thigh while she was campaigning door to door. Reyes was participating in the event, so questions remain on whether the attack was aimed at him. Witnesses reported that the perpetrator was a minor and Police are investigating this incident. We believe this was an isolated case of violence and not a harbinger of worse things to come.

Former campaign manager re-appears

[14.](#) (U) PRD Martin Torrijos' first cousin and former campaign manager Hugo Torrijos re-appeared on a live TV interview campaigning for Martin. Hugo Torrijos, who had been "separated" from the campaign early in January 2004 due to his links with the PECC scandal (reftel C), has returned as "electoral promoter" ("encargado de oferta electoral"). In that capacity, Hugo's two main responsibilities are making sure party promoters ask voters to vote for the entire party slate ("voto en plancha") and that voters nationwide gets transportation to voting centers on Election Day. Hugo Torrijos announced that the PRD wants to get a solid legislative majority to avoid the need for alliances with smaller parties. (This comment probably did not sit well with the Partido Popular, which is a PRD ally and hopes to secure as many as seven seats, which would give them greater leverage in a PRD government.)

Potential Cabinet members

15. (U) During a TV interview, Solidarity presidential candidate Guillermo Endara announced that his First Vice Presidential candidate Guillermo Ford would become his Minister of Economy and Finance. Endara also said Second Vice Presidential candidate Alejandro Posse would be his Agriculture Minister. Former Foreign Minister Jose Raul Mulino would Endara's Foreign Minister again, and current Alternate Attorney General Mercedes A. de Grimaldo would become the new Attorney General when current Attorney General Jose Sossa's term expires in December 2004. El Panama America confirmed these names in a 3/25 article about potential cabinet members.

16. (SBU) El Panama America had approached all candidates asking for names of likely Cabinet ministers in the next government. Arnulfista candidate Jose Miguel Aleman mentioned only campaign manager Carlos Raul Piad as a future Cabinet member. Torrijos refused to give names to the newspaper, but in a TV interview on 3/25, he finally announced that actor/singer Ruben Blades will be part of his cabinet, along with his two Vice Presidents, Samuel Lewis Navarro and Ruben Arosemena. Strong rumors are that Lewis Navarro would also serve as Torrijos' Foreign Minister. Arosemena allegedly would be in charge of anti-corruption plans within the Cabinet. Cambio Democratico Ricardo Martinelli recited a list of mostly well-known, well-reputed Panamanians that might end up in his Cabinet. The voluminous list even included highly successful banker Alberto Vallarino, who obtained 17% of the popular vote as a 1999 presidential candidate, but would likely refuse a job in anyone's Cabinet.

Martin Torrijos to void his vote

17. (SBU) In an interview hosted by popular boxing journalist Juan Carlos Tapia, Torrijos, the last of the four candidates to appear, said if he were not running that he would void his vote. Tapia just laughed when Torrijos dodged the question. Tapia has been linked to the PRD for many years and traditionally his political comments before his boxing show criticize whoever is in power. Tapia did not turn the screws on Torrijos to answer the question, as he did for Martinelli and Endara, or criticize his evasiveness, as he did with Aleman. Tapia told Torrijos on air that he is the only candidate he, "considers a friend," providing more reason to believe allegations of his bias toward Torrijos.